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ABSTRACT

A short facts quiz can be an effective opener in an adult education class. Although true-and-false quizzes work well, facts quizzes do not need to have a dichotomous structure. However, questions should be based on the content to be covered in the course, and it is best to use questions that are empirical in nature. Such facts-based quizzes allow teachers to build an early information base while at the same time examining students' values and attitudes toward certain issues. The benefits of opening-session facts quizzes are numerous. They are highly flexible, invite interaction, and help create a common language. Moreover, facts quizzes are an easy way for teachers to clarify misconceptions or compare different groups' knowledge about an issue. Using facts quizzes as a pretest/posttest of learning in a course, especially when scores are kept anonymous and aggregated, is another of their many possible applications. (MN)

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TECHNíQUES

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## Using A Facts Quiz As A First Class Exercise

*by Michael Brady, Associate Professor of Adult Education and Gerontology, University of Southern Maine.*

As a teacher of adults, I have experimented widely with first class exercises. As experienced teachers know, like telling a good story or playing a piece of music, getting off to a good start in teaching a course can go a long way toward making that course a success.

An exercise that has been a very effective opener for me is the use of a short facts quiz. Assuming the class session extends for at least two hours, after doing the appropriate climate setting and orientation for a course, I often spend the final hour administering and discussing a short quiz. In many cases, this will be the only "test" students will take during the entire course, and there is no pressure associated with it as long as the instructor introduces the quiz as an orientation and learning tool. It should be clearly stated that a score will not be calculated and nothing will be turned back to the teacher for evaluation. Because I always take care to articulate the purpose of the quiz, in the 80 to 100 groups with which I have used one, I have never met with resistance in administering a first class facts quiz.

True/False type instruments have worked well for me. But it is not necessary that the quiz structure be dichotomous. However, questions on the quiz should be based upon content to be covered in the course. The best questions are empirical in nature, that is, ones that have definite answers based upon known research findings. The reason for this is that values and attitudes can still be discussed when examining questions that have a factual base. In other words, facts-based questions allow the instructor to both build an early base of information in a course and examine students' values toward certain issues.

As a teacher of gerontology, the following represent examples of questions I include in a short facts quiz in my social gerontology course:

- Over sixteen percent of the U.S. population is now age 65 or over (True/False)
- Old people usually take longer to learn something new (True/False)
- There are two widows for each widower among the elderly (True/False)

In my course on adult learning, I have often used the following:

- Elderhostel is an international network of educational institutions which sponsor liberal arts programs for persons of retirement age (True/False)
- Research has shown that so-called "crystallized" intelligence declines with aging. (True/False)
- Most adults prefer expressive education, that is, learning for the sake of learning. (True/False)

I have found there are numerous advantages to using a short facts quiz in my teaching of adults. Among them are the following:

1. Facts quizzes are highly flexible. They can be of varying length (mine have ranged from 5 to 50 questions) and can be constructed for any content area being taught.
2. They invite interaction. Because course participants are asked to commit themselves to answering questions prior to discussion, they often will defend their positions. Particularly controversial questions can lead to lively group discussion.
3. The quiz can present an overview of issues to be treated in the full course of study. Questions can be selected to represent a range of topics, giving students a good sense of issues they will be meeting in greater detail as the course progresses. Sometimes, a well designed introductory facts quiz gives a better flavor of what content will be covered in a course than will a syllabus.

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4. It can help to clarify misconceptions. People entering a new field of study can benefit very early in a course from receiving a factual foundation of the subject area.
5. It creates a common language. One of the frustrations many teachers of adults express is that their students have widely varying understandings of the subject to be studied. While the facts quiz does not weaken the natural heterogeneity of the group, it does help create a common baseline of information from which to build.
6. It can be used as a pre-test/post-test and, therefore, can measure learning. Scores during the first class can be aggregated and compared with a second administration of the same instrument as one indicator of the learning that has been achieved in the course (but take care that individual scores remain anonymous—otherwise you may face a good deal of uneasiness and resistance).
7. There may be occasion to want to compare different groups' knowledge about an issue. A facts quiz can help to measure a group's level of information which may be compared with other groups.
8. A facts quiz is relatively easy to develop and simple to administer. While the initial planning of a quiz requires a view of the whole course and may take considerable time,it is very simple to administer. The few minutes it takes to actually give a class a facts quiz may pay off in hours of lively, productive group discussion.

I have also found that facts quizzes can work during workshops and other short-term educational activities. They can be an efficient way to communicate a lot of information to a group of people without resorting to lecturing. They encourage participation and can help build a foundation of content which can be developed through self-study or additional educational programs.